

DIPLOMACY:

CPYRGHT

Saigon and CIA

Significantly, John H. Richardson's career in the current Who's Who in America ends with a dash: "spl. asst. to ambassador, Manila, P.I., 1959-." With part of the gap in that biography filled in, a new dash of intrigue was added last week to the story of America's involvement in South Vietnam.

Since April 1962, Richardson had been "special assistant" to the American ambassador in Saigon. The diplomatic title was a cover: a top man in the Central Intelligence Agency, Richardson—sim, 50, and "unflappable"—was in charge of the CIA's extensive and expensive campaign against the Communists in Vietnam. Early this month—amid newspaper reports that the CIA had been waging its own secret war against

U.S. policy in Saigon—he returned to Washington for "consultations." Last week, President Kennedy disclosed that Richardson would not go back.

What had really happened? At first glance, Richardson's banishment looked like the latest result of the friction between the CIA and the State Department that has become almost traditional in Southeast Asia. Having worked closely with the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem, the CIA, according to this interpretation, had balked at the new policy line from Washington calling for the ouster of Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and sister-in-law, the barb-tongued Mme. Nhu.

Without denying that friction existed, Washington observers insisted last week that Richardson's difficulties in Saigon stemmed not from an unwillingness to abide by U.S. policy, but from a frustrating inability to find out just what it was. The CIA's critics and the agency itself agreed on one thing: Richardson had to be recalled because his diplomatic cover had been exposed. One story in Saigon was that the CIA man had compromised himself by leaking his grievances to the press.

'Dedicated': It was a serious charge—especially so in the case of a trusted operative like Richardson, who held key posts in Vienna and Athens before assignment to Manila and Saigon. The CIA decided the charge. Its story: Richardson had blown his cover while directing the training of brother Nhu's

"special forces"—a ticklish job the CIA undertook because no other U.S. agency was equipped to do the job.

At his press conference, the President singled out Richardson as a "dedicated public servant" and he denied emphatically that the CIA had undertaken any "independent activities" in Vietnam. There was no current disagreement at top levels of government over U.S. policy in Saigon, the President said. "Now if down below there is disagreement I think in part it would be because they are not wholly informed of what actions we are taking."

Although the Administration was accentuating the positive, there were already signs of fresh friction in Saigon between the CIA and Henry Cabot Lodge, the new U.S. ambassador.

Even before he left for his mission to Vietnam, Lodge had insisted that an intelligence specialist, Col. John Michael Dunn, be assigned to his staff as "special assistant to the ambassador"—the job title Richardson held. Scuttlebutt in the Vietnamese capital was that Lodge was grooming his protégé to take over all intelligence activities. But CIA sources insisted last week that the choice of intelligence chief would be made by the CIA alone—and it wouldn't be Lodge's man.